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ABSTRACT

This paper contains bibliographies of Latin American fiction and classroom applications for use in a 3-week unit in an introduction to fiction class. Section 1 discusses background research, selection of materials, choice of authors, translation issues, and plans for future study and course development. Section 2 contains an annotated bibliography of 21 novels and anthologies for curriculum consideration. Section 3 presents a classroom bibliography of short fiction containing 23 entries suitable for inclusion in the course. Section 4 discusses classroom application, with an outline of readings and discussion topics by week, as well as suggested approaches for midterm paper topics, including: (1) narrative point of view; (2) setting; (3) characterization; and (4) thematic elements in fiction as motivation for plot and characterization. Appended to the original plan were the following seven stories by Latin American authors: "The Garden of Forking Paths" by Jorge Luis Borges (Argentina); "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings" by Gabriel Garcia-Marquez (Columbia); "The Walk" by Jose Donoso (Chile); "The Cooking Lesson" by Rosario Castellanos (Mexico); "The Night Face Up" Julio Cortazar (Argentina); "An Act of Vengeance" by Isabel Allende (Chile); and "The Featherless Buzzards" by Julio Ramon Ribeyro (Peru). Because these stories were photocopied from copyrighted sources they are not included in ERIC's copy. (RS)

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ED 435 105

ENGLISH/EDUCATION

FICTION FROM THE OTHER AMERICAS: BIBLIOGRAPHIC SURVEYS AND CLASSROOM APPLICATIONS

Use In: Introduction to Fiction (ENG 201)

BY:

ELIZABETH MAHONY

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

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CS 216 927

Latin American Studies Seminar
Final Project--Spring 1998

Elizabeth M. Mahony
26 October 1998

Fiction from the Other Americas:

Bibliographic Surveys and Classroom Applications in

English 201: Introduction to Fiction

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[A Separate Packet]

Borges, Jorge Luis (Argentia). "The Garden of Forking Paths"

Garcia-Marquez, Gabriel (Colombia). "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings"

Donoso, Jose (Chile). "The Walk"

Castellanos, Rosario (Mexico). " The Cooking Lesson"

Cortazar, Julio (Argentina). "The Night Face Up"

Allende, Isabel (Chile). "An Act of Vengeance"

Ribeyro, Julio Ramon (Peru). " The Featherless Buzzards"

Latin American Studies
Spring 1998

Elizabeth M. Mahony
Final Project

Preface

In the summer of 1979, I announced all too publicly that the great innovations in fiction since World War II were not occurring in English but rather in Japanese, German, and Spanish. On the fifth day of comprehensives, leading my response to "Genre: The Novel," this manifesto proved upsetting to my readers, though they grudgingly passed the essays which followed. Candidates for the Ph.D. in English were not expected to muck about beyond those borders extending from the Cliffs of Dover to the Monterey Peninsula. What a catharsis, then, the Global Studies program stimulated this past spring: an opportunity to pursue literature from The Other Americas in the company of colleagues who would be neither puzzled nor piqued. And what a bountiful feast has followed those 1970 English publications of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Jose Donoso, Jorge Borges, and Julio Cortazar, writers who had once led me astray!

Seriously hampered by a lack of Spanish, I realize this literature will remain forever an interest dependent on the clarity of translations, and I have become much more carefully attuned to the nuances of that craft than I had been. Of great use to me in understanding such aesthetic complexities has been Ilan Stavans' collection of short stories *Prospero's Mirror: A Translator's Portfolio* (1998). Mr. Stavans, a Mexican novelist, presents the anthology in

dual languages, Spanish originals facing English translations. Not only is the editor's introduction useful; the commentary by translators, explaining why each chose a particular story for presentation to English readers, is invaluable.

Dependency of this sort makes us humble--or at least more modest than I was in 1979 at the apex of graduate school and prolonged sleep deprivation. Reliance on others as sure-footed guides through unfamiliar texts has reminded me of what our students know and what I too frequently forget: we all need help becoming fluent interpreters of literary texts.

Even more than my reliance on translators, my stupefying ignorance of Latin American culture stunned me into frantic searches, sometimes arcane and most certainly undirected. In the wilderness, however, I stumbled across some useful, new perspectives, which appear in the bibliography of background sources. Rattling through memory traces were protests and letters in response to the great Mastodon--us/U.S.--traipsing through the southern hemisphere with guns, butter, big sticks and some very old fruit. Lars Schoultz's *Beneath the United States: A History of U.S. Policy Toward Latin America* (1998) helped correct some impressions and affirmed others, though I warn you: be prepared for irony, authorial as well as situational, from title to final page.

Needless to say, my project commenced as "expansive" but has been whittled down to "manageable." The section of bibliography listing novels represents where I began with very grand plans for a course in Literature of the Americas. I hope someday to shape these readings into such a course, but it most assuredly will not be next semester. The short story collection is intended to provide backup tales in years to come and to suggest to other English faculty alternative authors or readings they might use in English 201: Introduction to Fiction. From the novel and short story suggestions my colleagues may also find materials for the proposed World Literature Course.

Despite my obsessions about reading everything which fell within my eyesight before beginning a unit on literature from Latin America, I have never felt the least discomfort introducing writers like Garcia-Marquez, Julio Cortazar, and Jamaica Kincaid into English 213: The Short Novel or Introduction to Fiction. The seminars, our text, and the handouts from our Global Studies committee and our spring trip to Oaxaca have simply made me so much more aware of what I still need to learn. This project will be a perpetual work in progress, amended as new materials cross my sight.

The final section of this project is my current project: a three week unit for English 201: Introduction to Fiction. Because this is the "novice" course, I place a great deal of emphasis on aspects of the texts, both the

formal conventions and the means experienced readers employ to interpret texts. The seven Latin American writers will be introduced in the sixth week of a sixteen week syllabus, when a great deal of the preliminary work has been accomplished, and the students are feeling somewhat more competent as commentators on fiction, a process they will have undertaken on a weekly basis in a reader's journal, through posing questions on the weekly readings, from small and full group discussions, and from moderate uses of lecture format. That the materials will be "extra-textual" (and in one case extra-terrestrial) will help emphasize one context. To what degree do readers need to share the major convention of any literary text: a common language? The second major probe concentrates on questions of difference. To what extent must readers share cultural assumptions in order to enter into fictional universes? I am particularly interested in seeing how these discussions will unfold since choosing authors by "national identity" had not occurred to me. Each work has been selected on its merits, including the breadth of complexity it will offer inexperienced readers and its likelihood of provoking strong responses.

Bibliography

In no way are the following texts intended to be inclusive. What follows merely helped me along the way and will be added to (and from time to time deleted from) as semesters wax and wane.

A. Setting a Context:

Fuentes, Carlos. *The Buried Mirror: Reflections on Spain and the New World*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992.

Published during the 500th Anniversary of the European Encounter, this work is oddly and unevenly developed but does emphasize the importance of Spain as a common bond among Spanish (and Portuguese) America: Law, language, social-cultural connections are emphasized. Good background for the woefully ignorant--like me--and reminiscent of Ireland at the turn of the century. As James Joyce exclaimed "If I write in Gaelic where are the two people who might read me?"

Schoultz, Lars. *Beneath the United States: A History of U.S. Policy Toward Latin America*. Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1998.

A disturbing history of U.S. policy toward Latin America from acquisition of property, the persistence of slavery as motive, and unadorned racism, all manifested in public and diplomatic sources from James Monroe's to George Bush's administrations. Policy has always centered on U.S. security, threatened not by Latin American "interlopers" but from their presumed allies, an accommodation of U.S. domestic politics, and promotion of U.S. economic development. For two hundred years, Schoultz argues, the U.S. has fashioned its relationships with our southern hemispheric neighbors on John Quincy Adams' condescending dismissal or all peoples and policies "Hispanic."

Winn, Peter. *Americas: The Changing Face of Latin America and the Caribbean*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.

"Text" for the Latin American Studies Seminars. Good background information on individual nations, U.S. relations with Latin American countries, and critical problems facing the southern hemisphere.

B. Literary Background:

Garcia, Kay S. *Broken Bars: New Perspectives from Mexican Women Writers*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1994.

Garcia represents four writers not with their own writing but instead with an introduction to each author, an interview with her and a critical essay about her work. The Writers: Elena Poniatowska, Angeles Mastretta, Silvia Molina and Brianda Domecq.

Lindstrom, Naomi. *Twentieth Century Spanish American Fiction*. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1994.

In this critical study, Ms. Lindstrom attempts to make distinctions between Modernism and Post modernism in Spanish American Fiction. But, as she points out, such terms must be defined differently than when they are commonly applied to "Continental" texts. Her measure of distinction seems to derive from mannerisms, embellishments, formalism and indebtedness to the French symbolist poets for works she deems "modern." The other "type" reacts through simplicity, directness, and reduced artifice. While some interesting possibilities arise from reducing twentieth century fiction to such polarities, the definitions simply do not apply to the Boom years--1960+ and those who follow Cortazar, Donoso, Garcia-Marquez, and Borges. As to chronology or geography as an organizing principle, Lindstrom has discovered that time sets dissimilar texts next to one another, destroying her argument for a "Spanish American narrative." What a reader is likely to see here is an author drowned by her thesis. As she struggles against the current, however, readers can pick up some notion of directions taken by Latin American writers which do not easily fit preordained categories.

C. Novels and Short Story Collections--"Staff Pick"

Allende, Isabel. *The House of Spirits* translated by Magda Bogin. New York: Bantam, 1986; reissued 1993. Published in Spain as *La Casa de los Espiritus*. Plaza and Janes, S.A. 1984. Knopf, 1985 first "American" edition.

A novel which could be used with undergraduate students, it is accessible. I found it more attuned to the "Gothic" than the "fabulous" [a form familiar to our students]. Racism in the third person narrative voice is consistently directed against Mayan/Inca ancestors and is particularly evident in "The Count."

Borges, Jorge Luis. *The Book of Sand* translated by Norman Thomas diGiovanni. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1977. [*El libro de arena*]
Thirteen later Borges tales, some previously published in the *New Yorker*, the Collection contains Borges' own personal favorite: "The Congress" (1974).

Stories contained herein represent the Master's late style; for class use, however, I have chosen "The Garden of Forking Paths," which will present students with a complex layering of "plots," not the least of which is a mystery-spy skein, akin to Borges' fondness for "detective" fiction.

Cortazar, Julio. *Hopscotch* translated by Gregory Rabassa. New York, Pantheon Books, 1966. [*Rayuela*, 1963].

Here it is--the single novel which erupted into a Boom--the advent of a Renaissance in Latin American Fiction. And an admission: an admirer of the short fiction by this Argentinean writer, I have not yet read the novel. It's on the "To Read" shelf. Much more frequently anthologized, Cortazar has some masterful short pieces including "Blow-up" and "The Night Face Up," included herein.

Donoso, Jose. *Curfew* translated by Alfred MacAdam. New York: Weidenfeld & Nicholson. 1986.

A terrifying nightmare, class distinctions are sharply etched in this novel unfolding in a dystopic metropolitan setting. As my introduction to Donoso, this novel in no way prepared me for the style of the short story I chose for class use: The Walk, an almost Jamesian study of a family's unsaid preoccupation with the chaos lurking beyond the narrow windows of their home. In *Curfew*, chaos has been loosed.

- - -.*The Obscene Bird of Night* translated by Hardie St. Martin. Boston: David Godine. [*Obsceno Pajaro de la Noches*, 1973].

This is Donoso's best known work--and, like Cortazor's *Hopscotch*, it lingers on the "to read" shelf.

- - -.*Charleston and Other Stories* translated by Andree Conrad. Boston: David Godine, 1977 [Cuentos 1971].

From this collection I have selected "The Walk," a very fine tale, one which, with its young if somewhat frigid narrator, will open familiar territory to students--until the surprise of the ending.

Esquivel, Laura. *Like Water for Chocolate* translated by Carol Christensen and Thomas Christensen. New York: Doubleday, 1992. {*Come aqua para chocolate*, 1989].

This first novel by a young Mexican writer proved an exceptional and daring entry into fiction: tastefully erotic, very funny, fabulous in the best sense of that word, Esquivel's maiden novel would provide a terrific short novel for English 213: The Short Novel--though it runs slightly longer than works we usually select for that course.

- - -.*The Law of Love* (1996) trans. by Margaret Sayers Peden. Every young writer must be forgiven her excesses. When I found a CD packaged with the book to treat me to moments from *Madama Butterfly*, I knew that book was in trouble. It's also illustrated in case you don't catch plot drift.

Fuentes, Carlos. *Distant Relations* translated by Margaret Sayers Peden. New York: Farrar Straus Girous, 1982(?) [*Una familia lejana*, 1980].

From this noted Mexican novelist, what might be considered a minor novel will be far more accessible to undergraduate students than the games-within-games of longer works like *Christopher Unborn*. Despite a traditional narrative structure, *Distant Relations* provides many of the tensions Fuentes notably sets in motion in all of his fiction.

Mena, Maria Cristina. *The Collected Stories of Maria Cristina Mena* edited by Amy Doherty. Houston, Texas: Arte Publico Press/University of Houston, 1997.

Born in Mexico City in 1893, the writer expatriated to New York City circa 1910. I found this collection rather late in my searches and was unsure whether to include a writer who lived in the U.S. until her death in 1965 as a Latin American writer. And then it occurred to me that Cortazor, Allende, Donoso, Garcia-Marquez--and how many more Latin American writers--have spent vast stretches of their adult lives in exile, though more frequently in Europe. Next time around, I'll offer tales from this writer--as we study T.S. Eliot in both British and American lit courses!

Garcia-Marquez, Gabriel. *Strange Pilgrims* translated by Edith Grossman. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993. [*Doce cuentos peregrinos*], 1992.

This wonderful collection of linked tales is both memorable and accessible. Individual tales can be excised from the whole as the author indicates in an afterward. But they do work best as a collection, each tale presenting someone in search, in "becoming."

- - -.*Of Love and Other Demons*. (1995) translated by Edith Grossman. Set in eighteenth century Spanish America, this short novel is an excellent choice for English 213: The Short Novel. It explores slavery in the Spanish colonies, class distinctions, hagiography, the colonial legacy of privilege, and polarization of "types" in Caytano Delaura, the young Inquisitor, and Abranuncio deSa Periera Cao, the physician-atheist, vying for the life of a child-woman Sierva Maria de Todos los Angeles. "Rapunzel" reinvented by the Columbian wizard of magical realism.

- - -. *Love in the Time of Cholera* (1988) trans. by Edith Grossman.
- - -. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1970) trans. by Gregory Rabassa.
- - -. *Autumn of the Patriarch* (1976) trans. by Gregory Rabassa.
- - -. *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* (1982) trans. by Gregory Rabassa.

Do you really wish to confound your students? By all means, choose the novel which, like Cortazor's *Hopscotch* and Donoso's *Obscene Bird of Night* turned northern literary eyes to the south. One of the century's great novels, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* should be required reading for all of us who teach literature; we will find it complex, amazing, enjoyable, exhilerating, memorable. Our students will find it perplexing. If you wish to sense how they will feel, try Garcia-Marquez's *The General in His Labyrinth*, ostensibly historical fiction winding about the late life of Simon de Bolivar (1990).

Chronicle of a Death Foretold (1982) is a fine choice for the Short Novel course, however. Among other virtues, it apprises students that reading for plot alone is not sufficient for readers of fictions.

Ribeiro, Joao Ubaldo. *Sergeant Getulio*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1978. reissued New York: Avon Books, 1984.

Much admired by every commentator I have read on fiction from Latin America, this Brazilian author offers a short text--in the other southern hemisphere language: Portuguese. The novel, an extended monologue from the Sergeant's point-of-view, is clever, scatological, and satirical. It is also almost impenetrable since we are in this character's, "head" far too long. I know, I know. Folks have complained of following Leopold Bloom for an entire day, which for the reader, of course, extends through months.

Vargos Llosa, Mario. *The Real Life of Alejandro Mayta* translated by Alfred MacAdam. New York: Random House, 1986. [*La Historia de Mayta*, 1984]

Written a decade before Vargos Llosa's unfortunate political career, *The Real Life* was my introduction to this Peruvian writer. Long after an unsuccessful revolution, a reporter seeks out Mayta to replay the story of an uprising betrayed and to discover not only who this simple Marxist was but how their doomed attempt failed so spectacularly. It is an exciting novel, providing insight into political tension among various factions in Peru. Having lost his bid for the Presidency, Vargos Lloso is back as a writer. His more erotic novels of late, however, would certainly raise a hullabaloo in our classrooms. A new offering was published within the last month or so; this I must add to the list.

D. Noteworthy Collections of Short Fiction

The Oxford Book of Latin American Stories edited by Roberto Gonzalez Echevarria. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

This is a fine introduction to the topic, containing as well a solid bibliography. Gonzales-Echevarria has arranged the collection according to periods following the European Conquest: Colonial; New Nations; Contemporary Period. Oddly, two major women writers, Isabel Allende and Lusia Valenzuela have been omitted although attention has been given other contemporary women writers.

The Penguin Book of Caribbean Short Stories. Edited by E.A. Markham. London: Penguin Books, 1996.

An interesting selection of stories beginning with Folk Tales and legends, including tales from Guyana, Jamaica, Barbados, and Trinidad. Selections from the early decades of the twentieth centrury provide a chronological framework for the last quarter of the century. Helpful bibliographies follow the introduction, noting authors who have not been included, useful anthologies, and notes for the introduction. Of the twenty five writers presented, nine are women.

***Because my project had swelled so in size and because Caribbean writers may write in French, English, or Spanish, I have simply not dealt with them in this round of investigation. It's always a surprise to see V.S. Naipul in this context--and Jean Rhys!

Prospero's Mirror: A Translator's Portfolio of Latin America Short Fiction. Edited and introduced by Ilan Stavans. Willimantic, Ct.: Curbstone Press, 1998.

That this first appeared in paper does not bode well for the collection's longevity and problems do occur with a minor publisher and proofreading. But the dual language presentations of tales and authors chosen by translators is fascinating. Of the sixteen tales selected, all but two are contemporary; five stories hail from Argentina and only one from Cuba. Two women authors gain recognition (Luisa Valenzuela and Ana Maria Shua) though five of the translators are females.

Short Stories by Latin American Women: The Magic and the Real. Edited by Celia Correas de Zapata. Houston, Texas: Arte Publico Press (University of Houston), 1990.

A Pan-American selection of women writers, most of whom are contemporary, the collection is flawed by the unevenness of stories, a disservice to the excellent writers who are represented. Against voices like that of Allende, Lispector, and Valenzuela, some of the younger or less well known writers sound like souls in a Writer's Workshop.

Spanish Stories and Tales. Edited by Harriet de Onis. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1954.

Of the twenty one stories in this collections, eleven are from the New World. Translated by the Grand-Dame of Spanish-to-English, Harriet de Onis, teacher to a number of the translators in *Prospero's Mirror* (including Mr. Stavans), these eleven stories offer writers no longer easily available in collections of "contemporary" writers. Among those noteworthy for their inclusion in 1954: Borges; Quiroga.

III. Classroom Bibliography (Short Fiction)
Short Fiction Suitable for Inclusion in English 201: Introduction to Fiction

The following unannotated listing is of stories I found particularly compelling and will rotate from semester to semester when I offer this introductory course in reading fiction. Astericked items indicate those items currently part of my syllabus for Spring 1999.

While the tales may be available in a variety of sources, I have listed the collections noted above under **Noteworthy Collections of Short Fiction** and have short titled them here without publication history:

* Allende, Isabel. "An Act of Vengeance" translated by E.D. Carter, Jr. in *Short Stories by Latin American Women: The Magic and the Real,* 1990:18-22.

Asturias, Miguel Angel (Guatamala). "The Legend of 'El Cadejo'" translated by Hardie St. Martin in *The Oxford Book of Latin American Stories*, 1997: 243-244.

Blanco, Jose Carmona (Uruguay). "The Water-Hyacinths" translated by Toby Talbot in *Prospero's Mirror*, 1998: 305-317.

Bombal, Maria Luisa (Chile). "The Tree" translated by Richard and Julia Cunningham in *The Oxford Book of Latin American Stories*, 1997: 133-241.

* Borges, Jorge Luis (Argentina). "The Garden of the Forking-Paths" translated by Helen Temple and Ruthven Todd in *The Oxford Book of Latin American Stories*. 1997: 211-220.

* Castellanos, Rosario (Mexico). "Cooking Lesson" translated by Maureen Ahern in *The Oxford Book of Latin American Stories*, 1997: 345-353; also in *Short Stories by Latin American Women*, 1990.

Carpentier, Alejo (Cuba). "Journey Back to the Source" translated by Harriet de Onis in *The Oxford Book of Latin American Stories*, 1997: 221-232.

* Cortazar, Julio (Argentina) "The Night Face Up" translated by Paul Blackburn in *The Oxford Book of Latin American Stories:* 337-344.

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* Donoso, Jose (Chile) "The Walk" translated by Andree Conrad. from Donoso, Jose. *Charleston and Other Stories*. Boston: David R. Godine, 1977: 71-94. Also in *Oxford Book*.

Echenique, Alfredo Byrce (Peru). "In Paracas with Jimmy" translated by Hardie St. Martin in *Prospero's Mirror*, 1998: 255-273

Ferre, Rosario (Puerto Rico). "A Poisoned Tale" translated by Rosario Ferre and Diana Velaz in *Short Stories by Latin American Women: The Magic and the Real*, 1990: 64-73.

Fuentes, Carlos (Mexico). "The Doll Queen" translated by Margaret Sayers Peden in *The Oxford Book of Latin American Stories*, 1997: 354-366.

* Garcia-Marquez, Gabriel (Colombia) "A Very Old Man With Enormous Wings" translated by Gregory Rabassa in *The Longwood Introduction to Fiction* edited by Sven Birkets. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1992: 579-584.

\- - -."Balthazar's Marvelous Afternoon" translated by Gerome Bernstein in *The Oxford Book of Latin American Stories*, 1997: 383-389.

Hernandez, Felisberto (Uruquay) "The Daisy Dolls" translated by Luis Harss in *The Oxford Book of Latin American Stories*, f1997: 165-204. (Because of the length of this story, I would also suggest its potential use in English 213: The Short Novel.)

Levinson, Luisa Mercedes (Argentina) "The Clearing" translated by Sarah Arvio in *The Oxford Book of Latin American Stories*: 205-210.

Lispector, Clarice (Brazil) "Looking for Some Dignity" in *Short Stories by Latin American Women: The Magic and the Real*, 1990: 121-128 (translation by Leland Guyer.)

Medina Garcia, Jorge (Honduras). "The Colonel's Blast" translated by JoAnné Engelbert in *Prospero's Mirror*, 1998: 193-207.

Quiroga, Horacio. "The Decapitated Chicken" translated by Margaret Sayers Peden in *The Oxford Book of Latin American Stories*, 1997: 118-124.

* Ribeyro, Julio Ramon (Peru). "The Featherless Buzzards" translated by Dianne Douglas in *The Oxford Book of Latin American Stories*, 1997: 318-326.

Trevisan, Dalton (Brazil). "Penelope" translated by Gregory Rabassa in *The Oxford Book of Latin American Stories*, 1997: 318-326.

Valenzuela, Luisa (Argentina) "The Place of Its Solitude" translated by Helen R. Lane in *Prospero's Mirror*, 1998:

- - -."Up Among the Eagles" translated by Margaret Sayers Peden in *Short Stories in Latin American Women: The Magic and The Real"*, 1990:. 190-195.

IV. **Classroom Application**

English 201: Introduction to Fiction — Elizabeth M. Mahony
Schedule of Readings — Spring 1999

Week 6

Readings: Borges, Jorge Luis (Argentina). "The Garden of Forking Paths" translated by Helen Temple and Ruthven Todd. [Handout]

Garcia-Marquez, Gabriel (Colombia). "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings" translated by Gregory Rabassa. [Handout]

Discussion Topics:

In Borges' story, what must we consider about the nature of fiction as illusion? What metaphors are employed to "reify" this abstraction?

In Garcia-Marquez's story, how does the author stretch our expectations of "story-telling" for grown-ups?

To what extent do each of these authors draw upon a reader's familiarity with sub-genres of fiction--say the spy-detective novel or fairy tales? For what purposes?

Week 7

Readings: Donoso, Jose (Chile). "The Walk" translated Andree Conrad. [Handouts]

Castellanos, Rosario (Mexico). "Cooking Lesson" translated by Maureen Ahern. [Handout]

Discussion Topics:

To what extent does social class impinge upon the elements of plot and characterization in each of these stories?

How straight-forward is narration, right? Each is cast in first person, with Donoso creating a man, recalling himself as a boy, watching the family dynamic unfold. In Castellanos's tale, a bride, facing her first domestic chore, reveals her unedited thoughts about her new status.
Hmmm. . .How does gender shape the telling of these tales?

The women in these stories are seperated by age. Aunt Matilda is well along in "maturity" while the bride has crossed a threshold--to young adulthood or to maturity? Consider the mandala we've been using as a model for initiation.
To what extent is the younger woman enjoying privileges wrought by social change?
To what extent do both women find themselves in a role defined by others as a "woman's place?"

Week 8

Readings: Cortazar, Julio (Argentina). "The Night Face Up" translated by Paul Blackburn. [Handout]
Allende, Isabel (Chile). "An Act of Vengence" translated by E.D. Carter, Jr. [Handout]
Ribeyro, Julio Ramon (Peru). "The Featherless Buzzards" translated by Diane Douglas. [Handout]

Discussion Topics:

Whoops! Have we stumbled into dreamscapes? Where are our illusions of domestic reality? Where are our fairy tales?

Consider the importance of setting for each of these tales, as time and place affect characterization and plot.

How does Cortazar merge past and present? Where does metaphor begin and "reality" end? How do the two distinguishable settings work to bridge these seemingly separate experiences?

Where would you place Allende's story in time? What details from the story suggest this to you? Is this historical fiction as Borges' surely was intended to be--set back in a specific past moment?

In Ribeyro's tale, consider to what degree the narrator's descriptive markers, especially at the opening, juxtapose setting against the grim reality about to unfold. To what degree do the tensions between urban metropolis and the shantytown bear out what has occurred on the human and natural dimensions?

By the eighth week of class, students will have been given a handout for possible topics for a mid-term essay. The following format suggests how the Latin American unit will be dovetailed into previous readings and how students might begin focusing their first formal piece of writing for the class.

IV. CLASSROOM APPLICATION

English 201 Introduction to Fiction — Elizabeth M. Mahony
Mid-term Paper Topics — Spring 1999

Length: 3-5 typed, double-spaced pages to be prepared out-of-class. Once you have determined your topics, see me in conference with a draft--and your plans for development.

Due:

Select one frame from the following possibilities. Each asks you to look carefully at a specific aspect of fiction as that element figures in a critical, thoughtful, interpretation of the story:

I. NARRATIVE POINT OF VIEW

A. First person point of view, used so frequently in the short fiction we have read in the first half of the semester, presents particular joys and problems for the critical reader. Through the lens of a single, created "eye/I," the other characters emerge; the plot unfolds; the setting either looms into the foreground or settles, slightly out-of-focus, as mere background against which the fiction is played out. We hear the protagonist's thoughts as meditation-reflection; we rely on the narrator's descriptions and recollections of others' words and deeds. We may take joy in the intimacy thus created, as though we were privy to the narrator's most personal thoughts, believing that as a trusted confidante, we share the narrator's privileged perspective.

In other cases we may be cozened into believing that we are the narrator's superior--more sophisticated, wiser, a more tolerant, more cunning--even saner--than the tale's teller, thus closing out important information which the naive narrator may unself-consciously reveal.

In your paper, explore how one or two of the following first-person narrators contribute significantly to a reader's bewilderment, enlightenment, and pleasure as that reader undertakes the process of making meaning cohere and finding significance in the text:

Yu-Sun, the double agent, in Borges's "The Garden of Forking Paths;" remember: this first person must be connected with the third person voice-over of the opening.
The Narrator, now aged, in Donoso's "The Walk;" consider how this point of view reveals much about Aunt Matilde, but also about "I."
The "I" narrator, revealing much Donoso's more than culinary lessons, in Castellanos's "Cooking Lesson."

[These possibilities will be joined to readings from Weeks 1-5]

B. Third person narrators, not directly involved in the story, also mightily effect our responses to the tales they have told. Explore in your paper the distance from or proximity to the protagonist one of the following narrators maintains as "he" reveals/conceals information to help or hinder a reader's establishment of meaning and significance. Consider the narrator's plausible intentions: does ambiguity add to complexity? Do limited choices and firm guidance increase or diminish your pleasure in reading and re-reading the tale? [Note, you may prepare this essay as a comparison contrast, choosing two narrative stances as points of reference].

the third person "fabulist," spinner of hyperbolic tales, who levels the most astonishing material with the mundane details of domestic life in Garcia-Marquez's "The Very Old Man with Enormous Wings."
the third person narrator who links past and present, waking reality and dream world, in Cortzazar's "The Night Face Up."
the third person narrator--perhaps ironic?--who reveals details of town gossip in the same voice as news of war, rape, violence is presented.
the third person narrator of Ribeyro's "The Featherless Buzzards" which seems to dwell on the transformation of Lima in the morning light as well as on the metamorphosis of Efrain and Enbrique, as though each phenonmenon were "normal" and even picturesque.

[Readings from Weeks 1-5 will be inserted here]

II. SETTING

When we consider this aspect of the text as it intersects with characterization or plot, we begin to realize that time and place are not merely backdrops against which action may unfold--or unreel. It can become a major fictive means of setting tone and in revealing meaning. Show how setting, including time and place, effected your process of establishing meaning in one of the following pieces--or two if you like to work in matched or contrastive pairs:

--England and its countryside circa 1916 in Borgès's "The Garden of Forking Paths."
--the sea-side community visited by an angel, bedraggled as he might be, in Garcia-Marquez's "A Very Old Man."
--the well-cared for, upper-class home inhabited by Aunt Matilde, her brothers, and her nephew and the view of the city allowed through such narrow windows in Donoso's "The Walk."
--the kitchen in its dazzling cleanliness and rememberances of that other life in Castellano's "The Cooking Lesson."
--hospital and temple in Cortazar's "The Night Face Up."
--Don Santos's hovel and pig yard and the sea-side dump where the boys flee--as nature's new vultures in Ribeyro's "The Featherless Buzzards."
--the community where sweet Dulce Rosa grows and bides her time in Allende's "An Act of Vengeance."

III. CHARACTERIZATION

A. TBA--one frame will offer minor characters as a means of understanding not only a major character but meaning and significance in the tale as well.

B. TBA--a frame offering triads of characters as a means of releasing tension will follow here when the Spring 1999 Syllabus is completed.

IV. THEMATIC ELEMENTS IN FICTION AS MOTIVATION FOR PLOT AND CHARACTERIZATION

A. Alienation and loss pervade a number of the selections which we have read, not surprising since the notion of humankind, afloat in an absurd universe devoid of absolute certainties, shadowed the shift from nineteenth to twentieth century paradigms in the physical sciences, philosophy, aesthetics and the twentieth century social science--psychology.

Examine how one or two of the following characters recognize loss and the extent to which their acceptance or denial fuels conflict, escape, resolution, transcendence, or despair:

Dulce Rosa Orellano in Allende's "An Act of Vengeance;" or Don Tadeo from the same.
Efrain and Enrique in Ribeyro's "The Featherless Buzzards."
Elisenda and Pelayo, freed from the Winged Man.
the young narrator or his father, Pedro, in Donoso's "The Walk."
young life before marriage for the Bride in Castellanos's "Cooking Lesson."

[and possibilities from readings Weeks 1-5]

B. As a form of comedy, satire--and the simpler "ironic tale--" traditionally were meant as humorous correctives of social and moral failings. They appear to have lost credence in the late twentieth century. Perhaps the success of such works depends on socially agreed upon standards of moral conduct--and on the reader's recognition of trespassed boundaries. Can satire exist only when writer and reader share absolute values?

In your paper, explore how one or two of the following authors satirize directly public institutions (government, church, the military) or individual foibles. After a close examination of your text, explore to what degree a "moral corrective" is either explicitly stated or implicitly suggested in the tale. Comment on the degree to which a reader must conspire with that absent author in order to understand the "butt of the joke" or the target of the ironic thrust:

narrative stance in Garcia-Marquez's "A Very Old Man with Wings."
the plight and perspective in Ribeyro's "The Featherless Buzzards."
the role of women as anticipated by the men and lived by Aunt Matilde in "The Walk."
the bride's self-knowledge, her resentment, and her ability to approach-avoid her anger in Castellanos's "Cooking Lesson."
Dulce Rosa's "final solution" for her thirty year hatred in Allende's "An Act of Vengeance;"
expectations for women in this community.

the final scene in Borges's "The Garden of Forking Paths" as it reverberates against time (including life-times) and space--China, London/Albert, England, Berlin in 1916.

Additional question frames will be added as we near, 1999; presently, of course, I'm trying to deal with Fall 1998--so it's back to Literature of the U.S.: 1930-1990.